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WITNESS (COX)  
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ALMOST AS SOON AS THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY INFORMED MEMBERS OF CONGRESS THAT TWO AMERICANS HAD DIED IN THE CIA-FINANCED REBEL WAR AGAINST NICARAGUA, A CHURCH GROUP WAS BROADCASTING NEWS OF THE BATTLE THROUGH A LITTLE-KNOWN TELEPHONE HOTLINE HERE.

Information about the Sept. 1 air attack on a military school at the Nicaraguan town of Santa Clara by so-called contra rebels reached the "Witness for Peace" hotline by way of four of the organization's volunteers, who visited the border town within two hours of the fighting.

Two Americans, members of an Alabama-based organization called Civilian-Military Assistance, died during the battle. The two, Dana H. Parker, 36, of Huntsville and James P. Powell III, also 36, of Memphis had reportedly volunteered to assist contra troops in the Nicaragua war. They died when their helicopter, which had attacked the school along with three fixed-wing planes, was shot down.

Four Nicaraguan civilians, all children of employees of the school, were killed in the attack, Nicaraguan officials said.

Officials of Civilian-Military Assistance said they volunteered for service in Nicaragua out of a desire to fight against communism. But anti-communism is not the only ideology that draws Americans to Nicaragua.

Spreading information about the contra war is one of several goals of Witness for Peace, a multi-denominational organization that sends revolving delegations of U.S. church people to the Central American country.

In April, 1983, the North Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America took a delegation from 10 religious denominations on a tour of Nicaraguan villages along the Honduran-Nicaraguan border.

"One town had been under attack by the contras when we got there," said Gail Phares, director of the Carolina group, "and the local peasants noticed that the attack ended when we were there. Somebody from our group commented, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a permanent presence here on the border to try to stop this violence.'"

A few months later, following meetings in Raleigh, Washington, Philadelphia and elsewhere, Witness for Peace was organized. Members of the delegations visit remote villages and towns in the belief that the presence of Americans in those places complicates the

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